

Community of Practice



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/phn/communities/resourcekit/index.html>

This pattern concentrates on offering a learning approach to engage learners in a process of collective learning in a shared domain. It is a way of helping to implement the patterns of COLLABORATIVE LEARNING.



Community of Practice (CoP) fosters learning through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. (Barab et al., 2003).

According to Wenger (2006), CoP consists of three main characteristics:

- *Domain.* CoP has an identity defined by sharing the interest of domain. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from others.
- *The Community.* In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
- *The Practice:* Members of a community of practice are practitioners (or practitioners to be). They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

The functions of a CoP include:

- Helping members to meet the knowledge needs of their respective interests and/or areas of expertise.
- Allowing members to share their available knowledge for the specific content area. This exercise covers revisions, updates and maintenance knowledge and experience.
- Encouraging members to practice the development of innovative products and programs.
- Supporting the platform for ongoing engagement with their peers, mentors and networks who share similar interests in developing new knowledge and skills.

Researches have reported significant benefits such as increasing organization performance by implementing CoP learning approach. Lesser & Storck (2001) identify four areas of organizational performance that can be affected by CoP:

- Decreasing the learning curve of new employees.
- Responding more rapidly to customer needs and inquiries.
- Reducing rework and preventing "reinvention of the wheel."
- Spawning new ideas for products and services.

The implementation of CoP faces some challenges. Members often find the focus on topics important to the community members fade away gradually. Partially, the shared interests are diluted due to the lack of time and encouragement to participate. Furthermore, the lack of pushing-force to moderate and facilitate the interests to exchange information will eventually demoralize the members to involve in activities and contribute in knowledge building processes.

Therefore:

Set up CoP by deciding the scope of its area of interest and function. This should include the domain that the members are interested in sharing and exploring the knowledge. Identify the core group to initiate and lead the activities in the CoP. The members can meet through an agreed medium (e.g. café, library or computer-generated virtual space) to conduct their activities for purposes of sharing and building ideas. Members will maximize the benefits of CoP when they adopt a regular meeting pattern.



Patterns needed to complete this pattern include APPRENTICESHIP, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, and DISCUSSIONS.



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